

Safe School Ambassadors®

RESEARCH BASE

The Safe School Ambassadors (SSA) programs (elementary, middle and high school levels) are built on a solid foundation of research, including the work of three pioneers in the field of bullying prevention: Dr. Wendy Craig, Dr. Ron Slaby and Dr. Dan Olweus. A review of published literature on bullying, conducted in 2004 by Denver-based Omni Research & Training, found that the core principles of the SSA program are completely supported by precedents and research.

What The Experts Found

Dr. Olweus found through his ground-breaking research with youth and bullying that:

- A school-wide approach is needed, especially to address the bullying that occurs outside the classroom (e.g., in hallways, PE, lunchroom, and schoolyards);
- If bullying behavior is ignored, it becomes the norm. When it is recognized and addressed, positive behavioral norms can be created and reinforced.

Dr. Wendy Craig established through her extensive field research:

- Adults rarely see or hear the bullying and mistreatment students experience, and don't intervene;
- The corresponding lack of intervention implies that bullying is acceptable.

Dr. Ron Slaby in addition proved that:

- Bystanders play a key role in resolving conflicts and preventing cruelty and violence; and
- Adolescents can learn skills to solve problems in nonviolent ways.

Key Research Findings and How SSA Incorporates Them

FACT: Other students are present in 85% of school bullying, and they determine the social norms that allow bullying to occur. Therefore, effective bullying prevention efforts utilize students' social power.

THEREFORE, the Safe School Ambassadors program is a student-driven program that engages a diverse group of socially-influential students to intervene with their peers to prevent and stop the bullying and other forms of mistreatment they notice.

FACT: Students in general do not intervene, either because they:

- a. do not notice or recognize mistreatment as hurtful,
- b. fear retaliation, or worry about losing social status,
- c. do not know what to say or do, or are afraid to make it worse, or
- d. do not feel sufficiently empowered to break the taboo against informing adults about cruelty or mistreatment, or think adults will not listen.

FACT: Involvement of bystanders **is the key variable** in reducing bullying because their responses to the bullying strongly influence aggressors' behaviors.

THEREFORE, the Safe School Ambassadors program empowers socially-influential bystanders by giving them tools and support to intervene to prevent/stop the mistreatment they notice.

FACT: Students with sufficiently high "social capital" are most likely to intervene in bullying situations.

THEREFORE, the Safe School Ambassadors program works with school site staff and students to identify the socially-influential students on a campus, and provides staff with resources to recruit these leaders to be Ambassadors.

FACT: Programs that incorporate a "peer support" approach—encouraging support for targets, teaching conflict resolution skills, reinforcing positive norms, supporting informal counseling-based approaches—increase pro-social attitudes and behaviors.

Therefore, the Safe School Ambassadors program equips Ambassadors with a range of these skills they can use with their peers, from supporting targeted students to reasoning with aggressors.

Field-tested in more than 450 elementary, middle, and high schools across the continent since 2000, the Safe School Ambassadors program has amassed concrete evidence of positive impact on school climate and on the Ambassadors themselves.

THEREFORE, in the Safe School Ambassadors program,

- a. Ambassadors build from their own experiences a common definitions and understanding of the 5 types of mistreatment;
- b. Ambassadors take action mostly within their peer groups, where they are safer and more influential, so the likelihood of retaliation or loss of social status or connection is greatly reduced;
- c. Ambassadors learn proven, youth-friendly things to say and do when they notice cruelty or mistreatment;
- d. as Ambassadors recognize themselves as empowered members of the school community and develop trusting relationships with adults in the SSA program, they realize that "informing adults" about potentially or actually dangerous situations helps everyone.